
UNSW GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT OF ORAL EXAMINATIONS

For Faculty Higher Degree Committees

1. PRINCIPLES

- (i) In accordance with Section 6 of *The Conditions for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*, the Faculty Research Committee or Higher Degree Committee (hereafter referred to as the Committee) may require the candidate to submit to an oral examination that must be undertaken in accordance with Guidelines to be specified by the Committee.
- (ii) The Committee will base this recommendation on the reports received from all examiners.
- (iii) The guidelines for each oral examination will vary, because the oral examination will depend on the specific issues raised by the examiner(s) and/or the Committee.
- (iv) The oral examination is a mechanism whereby the Committee can seek additional input from the candidate to assist in determining whether the candidate is able to:
 - (a) satisfactorily address the concerns raised by the examiner(s) in their original report(s).
 - (b) satisfactorily address questions related to specific points not explicitly addressed in the original examiner(s) report(s), where further clarification is required.
 - (c) satisfy the conditions required for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
- (v) The authority to recommend the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy lies with the Committee.

2. COMPOSITION OF THE ORAL EXAMINATION PANEL

- (i) Because the issues raised in each case will be different, the Oral Examination Panel (hereafter referred to as the Panel) will be nominated by the Committee on a case-by-case basis.
- (ii) A typical minimum composition for the Panel would be:
 - (a) The Chair of the panel: a senior member of the University with significant experience in higher degree research student management;
 - (b) One or more examiners;
 - (c) A person with relevant expertise in the discipline and someone who has been independent of the examination process to date; and
 - (d) An observer: e.g. Postgraduate Coordinator or other senior member of the School or University.

3. PRIOR TO THE ORAL EXAMINATION

- (i) The Chair of the panel will provide the candidate with a copy of the Guidelines specified by the Committee.
- (ii) The Panel members will be provided with copies of the Guidelines specified by the Committee and other relevant documents which may include:
 - (a) the original submitted thesis;

- (b) all examiners reports;
- (c) the revised thesis;
- (d) the candidate's written response including an outline of the changes made to the thesis or a rebuttal of the examiners comments as appropriate.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHAIR OF THE ORAL EXAMINATION PANEL

- (i) The overall responsibility of the chair of the oral examination panel is to ensure that:
 - (a) the oral examination proceeds in accordance with the specific Guidelines provided by the Committee; and
 - (b) all reasonable mechanisms are made available to the candidate to provide a stress free environment for the oral examination.
- (ii) The specific duties of the Chair are to:
 - (a) introduce the members of the Panel and the candidate;
 - (b) specify the role of all members on the panel;
 - Chair
 - observer
 - appointed panel members
 - (c) outline the purpose of the oral examination as specified in the Guidelines provided by the Committee;
 - (d) clarify what documents have been provided to panel members and the candidate prior to the oral examination;
 - (e) outline the procedures to be followed in the oral examination, for example:
 - the candidate may be asked to give an opening statement/summary of research findings
 - each panel member may ask questions, or questions may be focused on specific topic areas
 - the candidate may be asked to make a closing statement
 - (f) summarise the decision process as outlined in the Guidelines provided by the Committee;
 - (g) ensure that the candidate is given time to answer questions and, if necessary, allow a period of time for the candidate to consider a question, prior to providing their response;
 - (h) ensure that all questions and discussion by the panel members and the candidate remain within the brief specified in the Guidelines provided by the Committee;
 - (i) ensure that, if appropriate, the candidate is permitted to submit additional written material to the Panel within a specified period (not more than 48 hours) determined by the Chair;
 - (j) ensure that the recommendation is made in accordance with the Guidelines provided by the Committee; and
 - (k) provide a written report and recommendation to the Committee within an appropriate short timeframe (e.g. 48 hours) from the conclusion of the oral examination.

5. OUTCOME OF THE ORAL EXAMINATION

- (i) At the conclusion of the oral examination, the Panel will provide to the Committee a written recommendation consistent with the Guidelines provided by the Committee.
- (ii) The recommendation of the Panel will be considered by the Committee in conjunction with the original examiners reports, the written response(s) of the candidate, and any other information the Committee determines is relevant.
- (iii) The decision of the Committee together with a justification for the decision will be provided to the candidate in writing.